



## Weekly update

Through our research, community outreach and expert commentary, the University of Birmingham is taking an active role in the fightback against COVID-19. You can read our latest statements and follow our research updates at [www.birmingham.ac.uk/coronavirus](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/coronavirus).

Through Birmingham Health Partners, a strategic alliance between the University and two NHS Foundation Trusts, we are working to support frontline healthcare professionals. For the latest updates visit their [website](#).

### Research

#### **Air quality in the West Midlands: impacts of COVID-19 restrictions, March-May 2020**

Researchers in the WM-Air project have been examining levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and particulate matter (PM) in the West Midlands during the lockdown period. The data shows that future policies to reduce vehicle emissions in individual cities, whether through lowered traffic levels or switches to cleaner vehicles, will reduce NO<sub>2</sub> levels. Future reductions in PM will require coordinated, regional and cross-sector approaches. ([More information](#))

#### **Bioscience research at Birmingham**

Professor Timothy Dafforn and colleagues have established a group to coordinate research into COVID viral proteins in the Midlands. The group includes university researchers Birmingham, Aston, Warwick and Leicester, as well as from Essex, Southampton and South Africa.

This week, Professor Dafforn's laboratory began work on two COVID-related projects. The first, with Dr Tim Knowles and Dr Mike Tomlinson, aims to produce samples of proteins involved in the viral invasion process using a method developed at the University of Birmingham, which allows samples to be stabilised so they can be shipped worldwide. Dr Knowles and Dr Tomlinson are also working with Dr Luke Clifton at the ISIS pulsed neutron and muon source, Rutherford Appleton laboratory, on a surface-based test for COVID-19.

The second project, in collaboration with Professor James Tucker (School of Chemistry) and Professor Andrew Beggs (Institute of Cancer and Genomic Sciences), is looking to develop a rapid COVID RNA assay. If successful, the test will be less reliant on complex instrumentation and reagent supply and will be among the fastest on the market, with results available within 15 minutes.

#### **Clinical evidence update: viral biology and drug mechanisms**

Researchers from across Birmingham Health Partners are collaborating to analyse and summarise the latest COVID-19 literature to help inform clinical colleagues.

The latest update shows the current viral biology pathway and the points at which current clinical trials and drugs are aiming to intervene. ([More information](#))

## Research Update

### Drug trials: mechanisms of action

#### **Reducing global COVID-19 research duplication**

The Institute for Global Innovation in collaboration with Dr Mohammed Bahja (School of Computer Science) and Gibran Butt (Institute of Inflammation and Ageing), is working to establish an international open-access database for research activity on COVID-19.

The database, called COVID CORPUS (COVID-19 Collaborative Research Portal and knowledge Utility System) will include all forms of research, including health-related, as well as socio-economic, behavioural and cultural. The aim is to facilitate the compilation of all ongoing research activity on COVID-19 globally, and so decrease the chance of duplication, and help increase the possibility of collaboration and coordination of research on COVID-19. The database is expected to go live within the next couple of weeks. ([More information](#))

## Community

### **Vice-Chancellor's Great Debate highlights the challenges we have in trusting social media**

Moderated by Ritula Shah, journalist and regular presenter of The World Tonight on BBC Radio 4, the panel of Anne McElvoy (Senior Editor, The Economist), Will Moy (Chief Executive, Full Fact), Isabel Oakeshott (Political journalist and commentator) and the University of Birmingham's Alice Roberts (Professor of Public Engagement in Science) discussed the complex world of social media and the particular challenges we have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. You can watch the broadcast back in full by following this link: ([Watch broadcast](#))

### **Living with the pandemic webinar series**

The Institute for Global Innovation recently held their first webinar in a new series looking at the issues surrounding COVID-19. The webinars bring together a panel of academics to discuss the evidence and take questions from the online audience. Our next webinar will be on **easing the lockdown** and will take place on Wednesday 3 June, 12:00-13:00 BST.

Professor Hisham Mehanna will convene the panel and will be joined by:

- Professor John Bryson - social distancing: people are the problem
- Professor Heather Widdows - ethical and privacy implications of the COVID Symptom Tracker App
- Professor Willem van Schaik - lessons learned from those countries ahead of the UK

([Event details](#))

## Comment

### **Track, trace and contain – but don't keep our data: Ethical and legal worries of the NHSX App**

Jean McHale, Professor of Health Care Law, and Heather Widdows, John Ferguson Professor of Global Ethics, write that if the government want to hold our data we need more clarity and assurance that our fundamental human rights will be respected and that future research will be ethical. ([More information](#))

### **The Uneven Economic Impact of COVID-19: Evidence From Claimant Counts**

Dr Tasos Kitsos looks into the latest data on claimant counts and discusses the evolving COVID-19 economic crisis. ([More information](#))

### **The risk of re-opening schools in the UK too early**

In this video Colin Diamond, Professor of Education Leadership, says the decision to reopening schools should be led by safety, not economics. ([More information](#))

### **How long will we comply with COVID lockdown? 3 tests for legitimate rules**

Dr Claire Mcloughlin and Professor David Hudson write about how the collective willpower to suspend productive life fades after the initial shock of the COVID-19 crisis begins to pass. Many countries are now facing a much messier phase of partial re-opening and selective restrictions. Governments everywhere will be testing the limits of COVID compliance. How can they bring citizens with them on an uncomfortable but essential journey? ([More information](#))

### **West Midlands Weekly Economic Impact Monitor**

The WM REDI team will be providing a weekly update on the economic impacts of COVID-19. These reports will help regional partners to shape responses and interventions to boost the region's resilience so that it can thrive going forward. Each week the focus of the report is based on research and evidence published that week. ([More information](#))

### **Why COVID-19 could boost business efforts on climate change**

Professor Andy Mullineux writes about the chance to reorientate the economy and distribute the proceeds of growth more equitably being one silver-lining of the COVID-19 crisis. ([More information](#))

### **New briefing: Forced migration, sexual and gender-based violence and COVID-19**

The "Forced migration, SGBV and COVID-19" research project was initiated in response to conversations with Refugee Women Connect and anecdotal information suggesting that forced migrant survivors' suffering increased in the COVID-19 crisis. We interviewed 97 survivors and organisations in five countries, 33 of which were in the UK. This policy brief focuses on the UK findings. ([More information](#))

## Contact us

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